

Cover Photo: Chief Musician Michael M. Shelburne plays clarinet alongside a Randallstown High School student musician during a public concert given by the U.S. Navy Band at Randallstown High School, Randallstown, MD. Jan, 2007
Taken by Musician 1st Class Casey J. Elliott. Released into Public Domain by the United States Navy.

Talking Points for Kids

Music in Schools

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Music in Schools

No one knows when music started. But we do know that human beings love music. Even babies smile and coo when they hear certain kinds of music. Music is probably part of your life. You listen to music. You have favorite songs. You probably dance to music at certain times.

Many people also make music by singing or playing an instrument. Since music is so much a part of people's lives, an important question is how much time should be spent on music in school. The question has to do with *playing* musical instruments more than it has to do with singing. A teacher can have a class of students sing quite easily. But playing an instrument like a trumpet, guitar, or violin is another matter. Musical instruments can be expensive. There are different points of view about whether children should have the chance to learn a musical instrument in school.

What Science Says About: Music in Schools

Everyone knows that playing a musical instrument or singing in a choir is fun. But did you know that playing music can also be good for you? Scientists have learned that playing music helps kids in a lot of ways. First of all, it helps with brain development. When a person does something over and over again, like writing their name, cells in their brains make stronger connections. With practice, you learn to write your name quickly without any mistakes. A drummer who practices hitting different drums with his or her hands and feet is also making stronger connections among brain cells – and becoming a better drummer.

There are also studies showing that learning about music can help students learn language skills.

In one study, scientists showed that students who had music education were able to pick out small differences in the sounds that make up a word. This can come in handy when students learn to speak a new language.

Kids who play musical instruments have higher test scores and better grades than students who don't play. Many believe that since musicians have to practice to get better, this teaches students to practice until they understand what they are trying to learn.

Playing in bands and orchestras also helps kids learn to work as a team. Children who play music at school are likely to be in trouble less, and more likely to graduate from high school.



Photo: This is the Carroll High School Band District Festival at Troy University 2009. Ozark, Alabama. February.2009
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What *People Say About: Music in Schools*

Morton Grove News: Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

Yesterday I heard that the Morton Grove school district is going to get rid of music classes for all elementary schools. I started taking trumpet lessons and band class in the 4th grade at Morton Grove Elementary. I looked forward to music class every week. I would practice every day to make sure I was ready for band.

Now I am in the 8th grade and just finished my second year in the County Honor Band. Next year, when I'm in high school, I am going to play in the marching band. We have great uniforms, and I can't wait to march on the field.

My parents are happy I am in band at school too. We can't afford to buy a trumpet or to pay for lessons. All of my friends in band can't afford to pay for their instruments and lessons either. For us, music classes in schools are the only places where we can learn about music and playing an instrument.

My parents were also happy to find out that there are music scholarships that can help pay for college. If I can stay in band through high school, I might be able to get one of those scholarships.

The thing is, if my elementary school cuts music class, I would not be where I am now, and I may have a harder time paying for college. Please don't get rid of the music classes in elementary schools!

Sincerely,

Adam Bain



Lincolnwood Times Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

Some parents at the PTA have been pushing the school district to include more music education during the school day. I am writing to say that I am opposed to adding music classes. I understand the benefits that music classes can give, but I don't believe we can afford it right now. Students already have enough to do during the day, and I think music would be a distraction from math and reading. Our children have been falling behind on their test scores, and they need the extra time in class.

Why should the entire school learn music when only a few students will continue to learn about music in high school or the rest of their lives? Shouldn't we focus on learning something that all students will need or continue to use for the rest of their lives?

If the PTA really wants music classes, we can schedule them after school. If a student has trouble affording the class or the instrument, maybe we can come hold a fundraiser to help them. This is a better way than scheduling it during school.

Sincerely,
Peter Filias



Photo: School children play instruments as the Pacific Fleet Band performs at Majuro Cooperative School during a Pacific Partnership 2009 community service project. Majuro, Marshall Islands. September, 2009. Taken by: Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Joshua Valcarcel. Released into Public Domain by the United States Navy.

What Our Leaders Say About: Music in Schools

Sometimes, schools cut music programs when there is a shortage of money. The members of school boards are faced with hard choices when money is limited. One choice might be between music programs or larger classes. In situations like this, it is difficult for school board members to know which choice provides the greatest benefit for the greatest number of people.

Music programs can be costly. Violins, trumpets, and pianos are expensive to buy. They are also expensive to repair. In addition, music classes are usually taught by music teachers. This means hiring one or more music teachers when schools can barely pay for school supplies. Further, only a small percentage of students in a school choose to take music classes. When faced with the choice of larger classes or music programs, school leaders will often choose to decrease class sizes.

Most school board members and taxpayers agree that music is good for students and their learning. But many leaders and taxpayers will argue that music is something that can be done in after-school programs or outside of school.

Leaders in some communities argue that this means that their children do not get to learn to play an instrument. Many families cannot afford the cost of music lessons and musical instruments. If there are no free after-school programs, students in these communities do not have the chance to develop their skills in music.



How Do *Other Countries* Handle Music in Schools

Like many children in Japan, Asako Ishikawa's day starts early. Along with her lunch and her book bag, she makes sure to bring her violin. She started playing the violin in 1st grade. Now she has played for 3 years and is going to be playing in the elementary school orchestra in 4th grade. She will have orchestra class several times a week.

In Asako's elementary school, music is a required class. All of the students in her hometown of Takayama are required to learn an instrument. Some kids chose drums, some chose the clarinet, and many of Asako's friends chose piano. Asako went to a concert with her mom, and heard an orchestra play. The violins were in the front and she knew that she wanted to play violin. It is a hard instrument to play and she has to practice a lot.

All of that practice was worth it, because now Asako has learned to play her violin quite well. Her family loves the little concerts she gives and she gets to play the new songs that she has learned. Her

favorite thing though, is to take her violin to her room and play whatever song she wants. Maybe this year she will have a solo in the big orchestra concert at the end of the year!



What Do You Think?

Do you play any instruments? Do you sing?

Does playing music help you in school? Can it really make you smarter?

Would you sign up for music classes if they were only offered before or after school?

Do you take music classes during the summer?
What kind of music would you like to play?

Do you think kids should be performing music during school time or after school?

Yes, I think schools should have music classes because...	No, I don't think schools should have music classes because...